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June 26, 1970

Surgeon General Jesse L. Steinfeld

Dear Dr. Steinfeld:

I recently received from the press bureau of the American Cancer Society a copy of your letter of June 12 to Dr. Jonathan E. Rhoads, President of the Society. This communication, as you probably know, was released to the press by the Cancer Society on June 17. Their purpose was obviously to inform the public that you, as the highest health officer in the nation, accept sight unseen the validity of results reported from a study on the effects of cigarette smoking upon dogs which was sponsored in part by the Cancer Society and publicized by that organization as a significant accomplishment in relation to establishing a connection between cigarette smoking and lung cancer in humans.

Since it was I who proposed, on behalf of the Tobacco Institute that an impartial scientific review of this study be made, I feel I should comment on your letter.

Your reasons for declining the American Cancer Society's request that you establish a committee to conduct a review of the study are hardly

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in keeping with the attitude of scientific objectivity which should accompany your high office.

You say that no formal review is necessary to establish the validity of the study in view of (a) its eminent sponsorship, (b) the reputation of the investigators and (c) the fact that two scientists in government service have seen the data and apparently agree with the reported findings.

As you may know by now, experts who have reviewed the report of this study submitted for publication to the Journal of the American Medical Association have unanimously rejected it. This is certainly a clear indication that informed observers have concluded that the interpretations made by the investigators were not supported by evidence presented. To put it succinctly, it appears that the reviewers were unable to agree with the claim that the dogs exposed to cigarette smoke developed lung cancer.

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It is fortunate that there are in the medical disciplines men whose judgments are not made on the basis of simple faith in the reputation of particular organizations or investigators or on the strength of a priori opinions. These

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scientists seem to follow the traditional standard of requiring that investigators' claims be supported by verifiable data.

If one is swayed by the reputation of sponsoring organizations, then one might consider whether an organization which has until recently sponsored anti-smoking messages featuring a movie star who was arrested for attempting to smuggle marijuana -- and which tried to continue those messages after that event -- deserves to have much influence in scientific matters. ~~Are~~ Scientists employed by government agencies which have taken strong positions against cigarette smoking ~~good~~ are perhaps not the best judges of the merits of a study which, if valid, would seem to strengthen those positions? ~~Are~~ AND investigators who issue their results ~~to the public media~~ in press conferences before presenting them to their scientific peers should not be entitled to have their work accepted without rigorous professional evaluation? ~~Your letter indicates that you would answer each of these questions in the affirmative.~~

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Although an independent group of experts has decided that the report of this study is scientifically unacceptable, it is unfortunately true that the American public which was led to believe that this study established conclusively a connection between cigarette smoking and lung cancer is unlikely to be informed by the public media that the study has been discredited. It seems how to set the facts?

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to me that this responsibility should fall upon the Public Health Service in line with its duty to provide accurate information on smoking and health.

I sincerely hope that in carrying out your statutory responsibility of reporting to the Congress on the health consequences of smoking you will try to be more analytical and objective in evaluating research studies than you have been in this instance.

Yours very truly,

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